

HHV-6

What is HHV-6?

HHV-6 (human herpesvirus 6) is a very common virus that causes symptoms like fever, diarrhea, and a rash. It can sometimes cause more severe problems, like seizures and swelling in the brain.

Almost all people get HHV-6 during childhood. People with strong immune systems fight off the virus and have no long-term health problems. After your immune system fights it off, the virus may stay in your body even though it's no longer causing symptoms.

HHV-6 is a type of herpes virus, but it's different from the herpes people get from sexual contact.

Am I at risk for getting HHV-6?

People with weak immune systems have a higher risk of getting sick from the virus. Their bodies may have trouble fighting it off. That includes children and people taking medicine to weaken (suppress) the immune system after a transplant.

How is HHV-6 spread?

HHV-6 spreads easily through the air (coughing, sneezing) and by close contact (shaking hands).

How can I protect myself and others from HHV-6?

- Wash your hands with soap and water often throughout the day.
- Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Stay away from people who are sick.

Do I need a test for HHV-6?

If you start to feel sick — like you have a fever, diarrhea, or rash — tell your doctor. Your doctor will test for HHV-6 by taking a blood sample and checking for the virus.

If you've had a transplant, your blood will be tested:

- At least once a week during the first 100 days after your transplant
- If you seem sick

While your immune system is weak, you'll need regular tests. To be safe, you'll keep getting tests even if they keep showing that you don't have the virus. A weak immune system means you're at high risk and could get HHV-6 at any time.

How is HHV-6 treated?

If the test shows you have HHV-6, your doctor may give you a drug to help kill the virus. You'll keep taking the drug until:

- Your blood test shows a lower level of the virus.
- Your blood test doesn't show any virus.
- Your immune system is back to normal.

You may get the drug by mouth or through an IV. If you need the IV, you may need to stay in the hospital for 1 to 2 weeks. Your doctor may also treat your symptoms while you get better.

Disclaimer

This information is prepared specifically for patients taking part in clinical research at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and does not necessarily apply to individuals who are patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your health care team.

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